

Selecting the Right Tree

Summertime brings hot weather. It is the time of year when we appreciate the shade of a big, beautiful tree. Trees provide other benefits, too. They can block the wind, help clean the air, provide fruit and nuts, and create a hospitable habitat for wildlife. And, trees make a great hideaway where children can play. Once you decide to add a tree to your backyard, do you know how to select the right tree—one that will live a long time?

When looking for that perfect tree for your yard, pick one with good form. Most trees should have one main leader (trunk) and a balanced number of side branches. They should look healthy and free from insect damage--and show evidence of growth. Be sure to get your tree from a reputable nursery that has inspected and certified stock. Select a tree grown in your area because trees raised under local growing conditions are more likely to thrive in your yard.

Container grown trees spend at least part of their life in a pot. These trees transplant well from early spring into fall. Be sure the tree is not simply potted bare rootstock. The root mass will come out of the pot intact if it is a container-grown tree. There should be plenty of feeder roots--those thin, hair-like roots--but not so many roots that the tree has become pot-bound. Also, check the roots for damage. Rodent damage is easy to spot—you will see evidence of chewing and, possibly, tunnels or holes. Avoid any tree with a rotten odor coming from the root area—it probably is suffering from disease.

Balled and burlapped trees usually transplant well. The tree's root system is contained within the ball of soil; the soil remains firm around the root system to minimize transplant shock. You do not want a tree that has been allowed to dry out. Make sure your tree's root ball is kept moist prior to planting.

Bare root trees are usually extremely small plants. Most of these trees are best planted in winter if the ground is not frozen or in early spring before the leaves come out. The roots are exposed, so the trees must be stored in a cool, humid place, and the roots kept covered with a moist material until planting time.

Knowing what to look for when tree shopping will help you select the right tree. A healthy tree will last a long time and provide many backyard benefits.

For more information on tree planting and other Backyard Conservation practices, visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service online at www.nrcs.usda.gov. Or call 1-888-LANDCARE (toll free) for a free colorful Backyard Conservation booklet and tip sheets.

#